

January 6, 2013 Lord's Supper meditation by Randy Lovelace

So this evening I want to thank you for your very kind words of encouragement despite my voice. I'm very grateful that there were a number of you praying for me. I went home and my head felt about three hundred pounds but I got some rest and it's good and I'm grateful to be here this evening.

And what I wanted to do is go back to verse seven of chapter one of Proverbs and to spend a few more minutes together unpacking a couple of details as it prepares us for partaking of the Lord's Supper together. Pray with me. Father, we ask that you would equip us then with this word. Help us to apply the wisdom that you give. Help us, Lord, to see that you are showing us the way to live as a gift, as a blessing. May we receive it as that, Lord, for you care for us in the deepest and most detailed of ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Let me read again from Proverbs chapter one verses one to six. "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equality; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." One of the things I said this morning is that quite a few the sentences that we would be greeted with in the book of Proverbs are also in many ways similarly worded among other religions of the ancient near East during the same time as the Proverbs would've been written. However, what is very unique in this, is just this phrase, unique among the biblical faith, is the notion of fearing the Lord. We don't see that or hear that in these other religions of the ancient near East. Because even though there is wisdom that is similar, what is unique about the Christian faith is the fact that while the wisdom might be similar, there is a different reason as well as different expectations for why we apply this wisdom, most notably encapsulated in that phrase, fear the Lord. Now one of the things that we need to be aware of, I think, as we think about the fear of the Lord, is to in fact observe that from the outset, according to Proverbs and, we would note, throughout the Scriptures, is something that happens over and over again. The Bible doesn't appeal to our emotions, first and foremost. It doesn't even first and foremost appeal to our thinking. It often, first and foremost, appeals to our heart as the seat of the will, as the seat even of the emotions, as the motivator of our thinking. Consider Proverbs chapter four, verse twenty and following: "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh." Verse twenty three, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life." That is very similar to Jesus's teaching when he was talking about what people eat and countering the notion that that's what makes a person unclean, for what does he say, it's not what goes into a person that makes him unclean, it's what comes out of the heart, it's what comes from the inside. So Jesus was often replicating this very idea when he would teach that out of the heart flows the issues of life. And so that the idea of fearing the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the place in where the fear is really embedded is in the heart itself.

But taking that into consideration, a couple of things that I want to say and that is this: the idea of again recovering what fear is. First, what does the Bible not mean by fear, fearing the Lord. What it doesn't mean is it's not talking about feeling. It's not as though one could say well, I fear the Lord because I have warm thoughts about him, or that I have the idea that in fact, well, I think about him a lot or I feel disposed to love him. Those are all right and good but that is not what fear the Lord means. It's not just having a certain emotion about the Lord, nor is it a cowering in fear from God as if because we've done something wrong so now he's going to come and get us. It's not that kind of fear, either. When the writer of Proverbs uses "fear the Lord" and when the biblical writers use "fear the Lord" it is this: it is an unconditional reverence--an unconditional reverence for who God is and what he has said about the ways that we are to live. Unconditional means it's not just about a certain portion of my life. It's about every area of life.

Let me go back a little bit this morning to our Sunday school time. One of the things we said about the gospel is that the gospel isn't something that happens somewhere in someone's life where they receive the message of Jesus Christ, receive salvation from him, and then move on to bigger things. But the gospel isn't just the entry to salvation with Jesus Christ. It is the beginning, the middle, and the end. It is the A to Z of the Christian life. Well, the same is the key for fearing the Lord, as well as, okay, what has been therefore unconditional reverence mean in light of the Proverbs. It means that he's given us from his grace specific instruction about the way that we're supposed to live. And it is not just

about external behavior---follow with me, if you will, with this idea. That wisdom in having an unconditional reverence for God and surrendering to him our hearts and the entirety of our lives encapsulates obedience, and we might think particularly of God's law. If you go back to the Ten Commandments you'll find commandments five through ten are so clearly and repetitively dealt with and replicated in various ways in the book of Proverbs. So you're going to hear, not stealing, keeping away from adultery, not coveting what someone else has, hard work, not bearing false witness, not being a liar. These are all things that are clearly covered in the Proverbs. But here's the beauty about what God has done--is while all that is the case, and we are called to obedience to the commands of God in his law, that obedience to God and obedience to the Lord goes far deeper than just those things. In fact as we look and simply take in what Jesus has to say, Jesus is constantly in various ways referring to the issue of our character, what happens not on the outside, but what's happening on the inside about motivations, about expectations, about desires. Those are things that Jesus is concerned about, and so what we find is, is that while the Proverbs in the desire to give us wisdom is very much about and a reflection of God's law and his righteousness, like the gospel it goes even deeper than obedience to particular laws.

God's wisdom is given to us and Proverbs is writ large for us to say, God and the Lord Jesus care for more than just our external obedience. He cares for the inward character. He cares for not just the decision that you make but the way in which you go about making the decision. We'll hear it in Proverbs that someone who is wise seeks out other advice and others as counselors. And so it is talking about, okay, not just the end--you may have chosen the right thing--I had to deal with this with a dear friend of mine. I loved him dearly and still do, but I remember he made a huge decision in his life, and I believe in God's grace and timing that that was exactly what he wanted him to do, but he made it entirely in a vacuum. He didn't consult with me who is a close friend, not only his pastor but a close friend. He didn't seek the advice of other elders, he didn't seek the advice of---He just thought about it, he prayed about it, and I think the Lord led him to the right decision. But we talked about this, that God cares not just for the decision that is the outcome, but how you make it. You are in relationship with other people. God is placed you into a community and your decisions and their consequences have an affect not on just you, but has an affect and consequences for others. We delight to be able to be involved in your life. And so that is simply applying the biblical wisdom from the book of Proverbs---that it is saying that those who are wise seek the counsel of others. Telling us this--and this is what we need to be restored and to be renewed in--that the law of God and the very practical teaching that we are given in the book of Proverbs as it will be unpacked is as much the gospel than anything else. It's a way of God saying, I'm telling you as my people who I've come to redeem how I want you to live.

So therefore, God's law, God's commandments, God's instruction doesn't become something that I have to do so I can get something. God intends for us to see it and receive it as a gift, as something that I get to do, and there's an enormous difference between the two. There are going to be times where we have to obey God's word because even though we don't feel it and it will feel like we have to do it, but in those moments we go back to his word and recognize it isn't that God just somehow dropped off his law and his instruction and divorced it from his character, or gave it to us and divorced it from our relationship with him, or gave it divorced from his redemptive desires. His commands, his instruction that is given to us to obey is always, always coming from and then to be directed back to a God who is full of compassion and mercy. And that is why the writer of Proverbs spends the first nine chapters with his tender talk between a father and son. If you don't mind for just a moment, let me read a few words beyond where I read this morning. "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"--my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors." I wanted to read that section to you tonight, because I wanted you to hear the law of God written in the context of a father to a son. Really what he has done there is he's taken the commandments, don't steal, don't covet. And he's then put it into the context, I believe, which we're always to hear the Lord Jesus's instruction, God the Father's instruction from the word that calls us to obedience.

My children, I love you, and the advice and direction and instruction I'm giving to you will be like jewelry gleaming in the light around your neck, it will be your crown, it will be a safe place. It will be a refuge because God's law and the instruction for how to live always always always comes from the heart of God who says, fear me. Why? Because he loves, and he is the giver of life. That is why we can obey, because he is first given to us. And he's given us this supper as yet another reminder, another mile marker to be reminded that this is a command but not something that we have to do, but something that we get to do because it was the Lord Jesus who invited us in the context of going to the cross itself. And he says continue to celebrate and to remember what I have done for you. Do you hear the command? Do you hear the grace? So fearing the Lord is unconditional reverent submission at the very heart, not just the external, but the heart, not just for the sake of wisdom, but for the sake of God the Father, his son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray. Father, you've given us instruction on how to live, and you promise that if we follow in these ways that there is righteousness, justice, fairness, and there is peace. That when you invite us, Lord, into your rest, you invite us into your grace in what Jesus Christ has done for us. But it's also an invitation to live as you've called us to live, not as a law separated from your love, but as a law shaped, infused and directed and empowered by your love. May we see that. May you give us by your Spirit new obedience, and a delight to walk in your ways, and to obey your word for your glory and for our good. In Jesus' name, Amen.